

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION.

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Misconception of the University Viticultural Work.

The report of Wine Committee of the late Viticultural Convention, as recently published in the city papers, calls for some comments on my part. The summary manner in which that report disposes of the samples sent from the University Laboratory shows that the committee, or those of its members who agreed to the concluding paragraph, simply misunderstand the purpose for which the samples were submitted to them, as well as the objects and methods of our work.

That a number of the samples were made from vines overloaded and therefore unable to fully mature their crop, which would of necessity produce "green" wines, was elaborately set forth in my published report, as well as in a bulletin previously published. Both publications were sent at the time to each of the members of the committee, as well as to every member of the Grape-Growers' Association. It should therefore have been well understood that these wines were sent to the Convention, not for comparison with the selected best samples, whether of producers or of the Viticultural Commission, but in order to give persons interested an opportunity to judge for themselves of the result of long-pruning and therefore of the overloading of certain varieties. The present season one-half of the same vines will be pruned long, one-half short, and will then show the contrast between the results of a restricted and of an excessive production.

Had I anticipated that the committee would do its work so much more hastily than has been the case in previous years under the able management of Mr. Pohndorff, I should certainly have restricted the samples sent to a few choice ones that happen to have come to hand. For, in the work we have undertaken to do, the aim is not to select choice lots of grapes for the production of extra samples, but to determine the prominent peculiarities of each kind of grape in the several grape-growing regions, the grapes being sent for that purpose by the producers, without any selection on our part. We make the wines as the grapes sent will make them, presuming, as a rule, that the grower sends his best representative sample.

I regret to note that the committee, from some cause, appears to have gone out of its way to condemn summarily the making of small samples. It is admitted on all hands that large samples represent more correctly the large scale outcome than small ones can do. But it is quite certain that the prominent characteristics of any locality, as to its production of sugar or alcohol, acid, tannin, body and color are identically shown by small- as well as large-scale samples, and these, the natural possibilities of each soil and locality, are what our experiments primarily aim to determine. That wines made in 5 gallon packages develop differently from those made in 1000-gallon tanks, is abundantly well known, and the committee appears unnecessarily emphatic on that point. The difference, however, does not even go so far as to prevent the accurate reproduction of the characteristic bouquet, but is felt mainly on the tongue. It will hardly be maintained that the above data thus accurately verified, are not of sufficient importance to justify all the work bestowed by us upon their ascertainment. That a competent winemaker will know how to make allowance for the unavoidable differences, and can come to a close estimate of the outcome on the large scale from samples made on a small scale, is abundantly shown by the results obtained from samples made under the most unfavorable conditions, in 1884, with the able co-operation and close criticism of Mr. Pohndorff.

It is easy to say that larger samples ought to be handled at the University Laboratory; but it is not easy to see how, in that case, the natural and legitimate demand for the kind of information now furnished by our work, could be supplied, since neither space nor funds at command would be remotely adequate for the handling of samples exceeding the capacity of 50 gallon tanks. I gravely question, that to fill up our working space with 15 or 20 large fermenting tanks and casks, would give any satisfaction to the large number of growers who desire some definite information regarding the general character of the wines they can expect to produce in their respective localities. To satisfy this demand, I consider by far more important than to "reproduce accurately" the results of large-scale work, which can be very fairly predicted from the outcome of small scale fermentations.

I must insist that it will require a more deliberate and well-sustained utterance on the part of the grape-growers of the State, to convince me that the system of investigation now adopted by the viticultural laboratory of the

University, should be materially changed for the greater good of the greatest number, or that the field of operations should, as a whole, be transferred to the hurly-burly of a large winery in vintage time. There is a certain class of experiments that can be made under these circumstances, but the difficulty of maintaining definite conditions, such as are required for cogent experiments, is very great, on account of conflict with the pecuniary interests involved, and where these are concerned the experiment goes to the wall. Moreover, it is the relatively inexpensive method of small-scale experimentation that most pertinently suggests the proper line of experimentation and progress on the large scale.

I think it is also to be regretted that while stating the full number of samples sent by the University Laboratory at 56, the committee omits to state that less than half of these (27) were actually examined by them. This fact, as well as the very different judgment pronounced by one member of that committee (whose opinion as an expert is especially entitled to respect), after a personal, leisurely examination of a large number of samples in the Laboratory cellar itself, about two weeks before the Convention, suggests that a closer insight into the actual work of the University Laboratory should be had before coming to sweeping conclusions.

E. W. HILGARD.

Berkeley, March 26, 1887.